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THE ROAD OF HATE : : *It Had Been Closed for Thirty Years, But a Woman's Ruse Opened It* : : By CHARLES SAXBY

It Had Been Closed for Thirty Years, But a Woman's Ruse Opened It

Blue Ribbon Fiction

THE October day was drawing to its close as Walking Ann reached the gate of the Rancho de las Palomas y Mar.

Behind her the road dipped abruptly to the beach, a dusty ribbon betwixt the base of the mountains and the surf; before her it wound evenly over the shelf of bean flats upheld by the bluffs. An enticing road, smoothly metaled, fading away across the tawny bean stubble into the golden haze of the California afternoon, sapphire of sea on the one hand; on the other the peaks of the Cuyama, amber and languid with fall, between them the narrow, twenty-mile stretch of the Ranch of the Doves and the Sea, but that road was not for chance feet, for across the whole mesa ran a wicked looking barrier of mingled barbed wire and prickly-pear, broken by a five bar gate bristling with locks and chains, bearing the sign:

"Private. Keep out. Absolutely no passing across this ranch.

"By order, ELLEN GLYNDE."

"Looks like some folks' idea o' heaven," Ann murmured as she gazed. "All just like it oughter be, an' most everybody else kept outside."

She knew that gate; with its counterpart twenty miles north it was known to the whole coast from Santa Barbara to the Montara; known even to all California, now that the county's suit to force the Glyndes to open the road was before the State Supreme Court. For nearly thirty years it had been closed, cutting off the dwellers in the mountain ranches behind it—and especially those in the Nacimiento. Ann pondered that a moment and there came a picture of a bitter mouthed woman, her eyes haggard with gazing out over the road she might never travel.

"Hm—if you wants a real quarrel you sure gut to go to your own family to get it," Ann remarked to the unresponsive gate. "Well, I guess I'll rest me a bit anyhow; not even Ellen Glynde can jail a body for looking at her ranch."

An odd figure she made, a woman alone in that expanse of mountain, sky, and sea. . . . A woman probably older than she looked, since, despite her white hair and puckered, berry-brown skin, there was so much unconquerable vitality still lingering in her bony frame. In sunbonnet and decent dress of drab denim, pack and rolled blanket on her back, she sat like one surveying the world with a glance of twinkling shrewdness.

Just who Ann was it would be difficult to say, since no one really knew and she herself vouchsafed no information. From fall till spring she was swallowed up in that great winter refuge of Los Angeles, far to the south, but with each April, as the skies cleared of the rains and roses and poppies flamed in the foothills, would come a day when her winter haunts knew her no more. Even whatever name by which she might be known in the city would drop from her, and up through the fastnesses of the Coast Range or out where the seventh furnace of the San Joaquin dips down to the desert lonely dwellers would begin to wonder if "Walking Ann" would come their way that year. Nor did she give any explanation of that, either, possibly not even to herself. There were many who questioned her, comfortable people following accepted paths, amused or slightly aghast at the sight of her tall old form passing on its solitary way, but to each she would give the same answer:

"Well, it's kind of good to be on your way—and it's kind of good to think maybe you're goin' to get somewhere sometime."

That was all, and on she would go, with never a backward glance, her gaze always before her into that allurement of sheer distance.

"Guess I'll fetch round by the Nacimiento and look in on Jane Donohue tomorrow," she planned. "Land's sakes, if the court opens that there road 'tis she as'll be the first to go sky hootin' acrost it—and a bitter pill for Ellen Glynde 'twill be."

"For years I been wantin' to see it," she continued aloud in the manner of one who walks much alone. "The gates o' hate they call 'em back thar in the mountains. Well, you be big and ugly enough, Lord knows."

It was an automobile that aroused her from her self-communing, an imported, gray-gleaming car which came purring up the slope from the beach in a perfection of wrought-iron lugs. As the chauffeur alighted with jingling key chain the other occupants of the car turned a battery of cold inquiry on Ann. Entirely out of place she seemed, sitting there unmoved, yet with something of the naturalness of those chaparral bushes at her back, and with a hint of their barbed potencies as well.

The woman in the car spoke first, gray haired, with a certain controlled sweetness in face and voice, every detail as soberly perfect as those of her equipage.

"My good woman, are you in trouble?"

"Not as I knows on, thank you, Mis' Glynde," Ann precisely returned.

She sat still, her browned face quiet under the eaves of her sunbonnet. The answer seemed hardly what the other woman had expected, and a shadow of authority crept into her conscious benevolence.

"It seems very strange, your being here alone."

"There's many strange things in this world, ma'am," Ann mildly replied.

It was the man in the front seat who spoke next; a little fellow, already portly, his face overlaid, as by a mask, with an awareness of heaven-given superiority.

The girl crept out into the night from the great house among the cypress trees.

"We don't allow strangers to cross the ranch."

"'Ceptin' funerals," Ann amended, "I've heerd you allow 'em to bring out their dead, but I ain't quite ready for that."

"What are you doing here?" he rasped.

"A setting on the public lands, sir, and if I set long enough maybe I'll hatch something."

"Oh, Fred, perhaps the poor old lady is lost."

That was hardly more than a murmur, such as might come from one accustomed to being disregarded. It was the girl who spoke; seated in the tonneau, overshadowed by the presence of Ellen Glynde, she had escaped Ann's notice. Now, as she leaned forward, she showed of a fragile, drooping prettiness, like that of a plant kept too long in a sunless place.

"No, I ain't lost, Miss, thank you," said Ann, with a trifle less of hostility. "Body and soul, I knows jest where I be."

She turned to the older woman, a hint of malice in her tone.

"I was restin' at your gate, Mrs. Glynde, because 'tis here the trail turns off to the Nacimiento. I'm aimin' to fetch thar right soon, and if you have a message for your sister, Mis' Donohue, 'tis me as'll be glad to take it."

At that name it was as though a shade had been drawn down over the faces of Fred Glynde and his mother; something blankly decent to hide whatever might be behind it. Only in the eyes of the girl came a hint of something human—desperation, perhaps, or possibly appeal. Her hand, slimly ungloved, fluttered an instant over the side of the car, and as the great machine rolled on through the opened gates Ann saw a leather wrist bag lying in the dust of the road.

She sat on, regarding it in motionless silence, wondering what was to come. A few yards the other side of the gate the car stopped again, and Mrs. Glynde's voice came on the breeze, clear and concise:

"You say you dropped your bag. How on earth did you do that?"

A moment of silence, probably covering an apologetic murmur that did not pass the car.

"Really, Lucy," Mrs. Glynde spoke again, in the irritated surprise of one whose own belongings were permanently in their proper place, "you are a most extraordinary girl. Now Harris will have to get out and go back after it."

The tonneau door swung open at that, and the girl sprang out with a swiftness evidently intended to forestall the chauffeur.

"No, please, aunt, don't let me trouble anybody—it won't take me a minute. I'm so sorry——"

It was the overemphasized tone of an accustomed under place. With her delicate prettiness flushed as by a concealed excitement, the girl hurried back along the road; the bag lay there in full view, but her gaze seemed deliberately to avoid it as she made a slight detour that brought her close to where Ann sat.

"I—I dropped my wrist bag," she laughed nervously.

"Did you, now?" Ann queried with some astonishment. Their glances met in a bland unconsciousness of the lost article lying within three feet of them, and with some embarrassment the girl went on:

"It isn't valuable at all; there's no money in it. I mean I never have any of my own."

"She wants me to do somethin' and she's tellin' me as she can't pay me for it," Ann silently translated as she listened.

"Of course, my aunt is most generous," the girl amended. "I have really everything I want."

"Exceptin' a dollar or two to spend as she pleases," commented Ann to herself. Then, rising, she spoke aloud.

"We'll have to look for 't, that's all."

Like the girl's, her own gaze seemed suddenly and violently astigmatic as, bending over the road, she passed within six inches of the bag without seeing it. So this was the niece old Peter Glynde had left without a cent and to whom his widow had given asylum.

"It must be here somewhere," Lucy Glynde faltered on. "I know just where I dropped it—— Are you the lady they call Walking Ann?"

"I be," Ann nodded shortly.

"I have heard of you from—from young Mr. Donohue," Lucy breathlessly continued. "He wrote to me all the time he was at the war, and I heard you say you were going around by the Nacimiento and—and——"

"You wants me to take a message to him," Ann finished for her. "Well, I'll do it—'tis a pity you ain't got a chanst to write him a line."

Lucy Glynde's flush deepened as with a frightened glance toward the car she fumbled in the recesses of her motor coat.

"I—I have one written."

Ann stared straitly up from her search of the road, a search so perfect that it had achieved the feminine pinnacle of deceiving herself. She knew nothing of the opera, she would probably have dismissed it as "a passel o' dog kiyi-in'," but as the girl drew out that note her chuckle was an echo of Figaro's at sight of Rosina's "viglietto."

"So you got it writ, have you?" she twinkled. "Don't you hand it to me, gal—you just drop it as you pick up that thar bag. That Fred Glynde's got his head outer the car a-watchin' of you."

"Oh——"

An added wave of red flowed up over the girl's face; her glance met Ann's with a look part fear, part guilt, largely courage, some gratitude, and completely of a strange mutual understanding. The next instant she had stooped, caught up the bag, and was flying back to the waiting car. And Ann, looking down at the dust, saw a folded note plainly inscribed "Mr. Terry Donohue, Rancho Nacimiento."

Not until the gates were locked again and the car had disappeared in a dip in the road did she pick it up. Raising her skirt, she stowed it away in a little bag slung from her waist which contained her most intimate belongings.

"So Terry Donohue wrote her durin' the war, did he?" she mused as she adjusted her pack again. "Them letters couldn't come to Ellen Glynde's house—I'll lay that gal rented a post box with a bit o' pawned jewelry and told her aunt as she'd lost it. Them as is always so darn right themselves can sure be a fruitful vine o' wrongdoin' in others."

Her mouth grew caustic as she turned away, following the trail through the chaparral where dried stalks of yucca bloom rattled in the breese like skeletons of bygone springs. Into a cañon it led, a mere cleft heavy with shadow in the dying afternoon. The loganberries were red on the slopes; below them madrones and sweet bay arched over the blue gray bowlders of the dried stream bed. Higher up she came on occasional pools of brown water, then at last a flowing thread, clear and cool.

"The summer's gone," Ann commented as she saw it. "The streams is risin' to meet the rains."

"Ellen Glynde and that chesty little sparrer of a son o' hern," she muttered hotly, "I'll teach 'em to sass me."

In deliberate silence she made her camp by a crystal pool where water beetles skated on the surface and a huge black and yellow butterfly sailed on a festal barge of a fallen leaf. Laying out her blanket with neat exactness, she took from her pack a coffee pot and folding fire grid, kindling a clean, hot fire of dry chips. Her silence grew deeper as she set out her meal, the scanty fare of the seasoned "hiker," a pile of oatmeal crackers, a bunch of Tokay grapes, redly translucent on a platter of green leaves.

With a self-control that was almost ominous she waited until the coffee boiled, biting delicately into a cracker meanwhile. Then that control broke, the coffee pot flew through the air and crashed against a tree, and after it, pungent and scalding as its contents, went Ann's words.

"Rats bite 'em—take that! I wish 'twas Ellen Glynde as I am aimin' at. I'd teach her to 'my good woman' Walking Ann."

"I'd better hit the trail again, I be too bilin' to make camp," she scolded on. "'Tis a plumb sin for folks to be goin' around makin' a body so mad as I be right now. But 'tis queer, too; the wickeder I gets the spryer I be. I'll lay as I fetch the Nacimiento afore I quits hikin' this night."

Carefully drenching the ashes of her fire, she struck again up the trail. The short twilight had gone, the full moon still a pale promise behind the ridge. The spring chorus of the mocking birds was stilled, and even the stream's voice hushed by the long months of summer drought; all was silence as, leaving the humid coolness of the beach behind her, she went on and up into that Californian reversal of the higher the hotter. A dry heat, the breath of the desert seeking the sea, bringing a sense of vastness as though the dark bubble of the night were distended by it. From behind Cuyama peak the moon came up, reddish and huge, poising an instant on the crest like some strange beacon fire before it swung off into the limitless spaces.

It was at the Nacimiento Forks that she came upon Terry Donohue. She had heard him for some time, the beat of a horse's hoofs, an occasional quieting word as its rider urged it along the narrow trail. Then suddenly he came upon her round a bend, his pony shying violently in towards the bank as she stepped down from the outer edge to let it pass.

Leaning from his saddle, Terry Donohue scanned her closely.

"Walking Ann, is that you?—Thank God!"

"Amen to that, though what it be about I don't rightly know," Ann answered.

"It's mother—she has one of her spells," he went hastily on. "I was riding out to see if I could get some one from one of the ranches; there's only old Teleafora with her now."

"Them Mexicans is no good," sniffed Ann. "If you don't watch out she'll be stickin' needles into your ma to drive out the devil. You take me right to her."

"That's sure a relief," he said as he dismounted. "Give me your pack. Could you ride my pony?"

"Young feller," returned Ann severely, "when the Indians quit the reservation back in the eighties 'twas me as rid forty mile to Laramie to take the word."

The moon was flooding the cañon as they turned up it, the bare bank of the trail gleaming yellowly amongst the chaparral. Scarlet stemmed madrones with glossy leaves, mottled ghosts of sycamores sere with fall, rock pinnacles fantastic and macabre under the eerie light. Ann rode silently considering Jerry Donohue as he strove ahead, slim legged, erect, her pack and blanket on his shoulders.

"So you got back from Siberia at last?"

"Yep. Just my luck to get sent there."

"I guess you be right glad to be back."

"I suppose so."

Ann thought about that for a while, feeling dimly that this was a different Terry from the irresponsible lad who had marched away nearly three years before.

"Don't it seem good to be home?"

"It ought to," he answered dully; then came a hotter tone: "Home! Good God, after all I've seen and been through, and here they are in the same old place with the same old hate!"

"Well, you done a good work, lad, helpin' to make the world safe," Ann soothed, but the young fellow's smoldering resentment burst out again.

"Yes, safe for Fred Glynde and that Jap partner of his to corral all the potatoes from here to the Mexican line and hold up the price."

"I could help break that if mother would only listen," he went on. "There's men would finance me in putting a road through the back range to strike the S. P. at Carmelo; it would make the ranch worth half a million at least. But no, mother must go out over Las Palomas or not at all, and here I am, poor as a cholo, with all this land going to waste."

He had turned, standing bareheaded on the trail, the straightness of his features accentuated by the deep shadows of the moon, his eyes blackly bright under blacker brows and hair.

Even so his father might have stood before him, Ann thought; that dead Terence Donohue, too handsome, too winning, too impulsive—in short, too Irish. Ellen Fall, they said, would have given the heart from her body for him in those days. It might have been a match had not her sister Jane returned suddenly from the east. In two weeks Donohue had married and carried her off to the Nacimiento; a month later Ellen had married old Peter Glynde of Las Palomas and promptly sealed its gates.

"So your's ma sick again?" Ann queried as Terry turned once more to the trail. "Was you by any chance talkin' o' leavin' the ranch?"

He stopped in his tracks, casting a surprised question over his shoulder.

"What makes you ask that?"

"Mayhap because I be a woman myself," said Ann shortly.

Topping the ridge, the trail descended to the vale of Nacimiento. A softer place, a richer luxuriance, its arable bottom lands wreathed in silver mist; far off between the slopes showed the dark line of the sea; a single light that told of the Palomas ranch house and a ribbon of faint gray that was the road of hate. Down they went between high hung orchards of pear and prune, of olives and almonds, or figs still heavy with fruit. A spicy breath of pine, a mingling of palm, oranges, and untended shrubs, a long, low house half buried in purple creepers.

"There's many a soul would think they was in heaven could they pass their days here," Ann thought, "while Jane Donohue—but 'tis what a body's got inside of 'em as makes the difference, not what's outside."

Dismounting, Ann stalked into the house, a place of that precise neatness which only a small soul seems able to achieve, heavily shut in against the glory without. A bedroom full of dark mahogany and the hot glare of an oil lamp. By the bed a Mexican woman crouched and fingered a rosary, casting glances of emotional pity at the thin form outlined by the sheets.

Of the beauty which had seduced Terence Donohue only her hair remained, its masses, hardly touched by gray, spread out on the pillow about her. There was something almost startling in the contrast between those lustrous curls and the face between them, narrowed and pinched by years of self pity, the lips compressed to a line of unconquerable stubbornness. Her eyes, large and brilliant, were open, but at the sound of Ann's footsteps outside they closed with almost a snap and the whole face fell into an expression of patient suffering.

"Is that you, my son?" she murmured as Ann came in.

She paused, her lips still closed, apparently spent for breath. Then her voice went on again, a faint trickle of desperate pathos.

"You are right, Terry, and you must do as you please about putting that road through. Do not regard my feelings, my boy—I am but a dying woman and this world is for the young and strong. Do as you please, Terry. I can bear it and I will never reproach you—it is only for a little longer that I must suffer. . . ."

Standing by the bedside, Ann listened while the voice flowed on in all the snapping tyranny of helplessness. Then suddenly her words came down across it like an acid dipped chopper.

"Jane Donohue, you quit them carryin's on."

The eyes opened at that and there followed an exclamation.

"Walking Ann!"

"Aye, 'tis me all right, and I ain't no poor innercent lad to be took in."

For an instant their glances countered and clashed, a pampered willfulness on the one side, on the other an understanding grim and impartial. Mrs. Donohue spoke eagerly.

"What is the news outside?"

"As I came through San Luis Obispo they was bettin' even money that the courts would open the road."

"Oh—the courts!"

The woman sighed with the hopelessness of thirty years of unavailing litigation. Her bosom, pinched and meager as though all its vitalities had been drained away by her consuming resentment, rose and fell in convulsive gasps.

"I'll never live to see it. Just heaven, what have I done that I should be tortured so?"

"'Tis you as be doin' the tormentin'," Ann put in. "Terry could have a road through to the valley in three months if you'd but let him."

"Terry owns the ranch and I have told him to do as he pleases."

"Yes, I heerd you tellin' him so as I come in," Ann returned.

Again their glances met and Jane Donohue raised herself on her elbow.

"I can't give up—I *can't*. Oh, if I could but ride once across that ranch and laugh in Ellen's face as I go—"

Her hand, a mere bunch of fevered bones, fell on Ann's wrist and at its hot clasp the other started in a genuine alarm.

"Woman, you are real sick."

"Sick—I am sick to death," moaned Mrs. Donohue as she fell back on her pillows again. "But I will never, never give in."

A quiver of pity crossed Ann's face. Wasted, narrow, held by that almost fanaticism of stubbornness, the woman lay between her masses of hair, and from her eyes, as from two windows, there seemed to leer the very presence of that obsessing demon—the same one that, except for those drawn shades of blank decency, might have looked from the eyes of Ellen Glynde and her son. As Ann raised her an uncontrollable spasm shook her frame, causing her to fight for breath.

"There's naught will cure her but to get what she wants," Ann thought. "And so long as she lives she'll keep Terry cooped up here and being dyin' whenever he talks o' quittin'."

"Lie you still, Jane Donohue," she went on aloud. "I got to speak to Terry a bit and then you and me is due for a talk."

Terry was sitting on the veranda steps, chin in hand, staring gloomily down the moon flooded vale toward Las Palomas. Holding out the note picked up in the wake of the Glynde car, Ann spoke:

"Here's a letter for you, lad."

He did not stop to ask how she had obtained it; his eyes raced greedily over the lines, then sought the gleaming night dial of his wrist watch.

"Ten o'clock already," he exclaimed.

"Most like she'll be waitin' for you," Ann encouraged.

"She's been waiting since before the war," said Terry bitterly. "If mother would only let me do something I'd have had her out of Las Palomas long ago. I'm only waiting until I have something to offer her."

"She won't thank you none for that waitin'."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I been a gal myself—you didn't think that of old Ann, did you? But I know, and you take her, lad—take her quick."

"How can I ask her to come here from all she has down there?"

"She's awonderin' how you can't."

"She wants to see me tonight—but there's mother sick again," he hesitated with a glance at the house.

"Don't worry none about your ma. I'll stay with her till you gets back."

A glance of gratitude, warmly fleeting, and he was mounted and off, galloping down the vale with a lover's recklessness. Seated on the steps Ann pictured him passing on his way, insulated from all the world about him by the joy of that coming meeting, in his face a light that shamed the mild radiance of the moon. Then the girl, seemingly so meek and fragile, creeping out into the night from the great house among the cypress trees.

"I'll lay she has to lie to get out," Ann mused. "Land's sakes, the lovers' lies the Lord has to listen to! Million o' years of 'em, and all the same since the world began—and I'll bet there's a kinder twinkle in His eye when He hears 'em."

Her face softened as she sat there, her sunbonnet thrown back from her white hair, her

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